

SPENSER AND THE ENCHANTED GLASS

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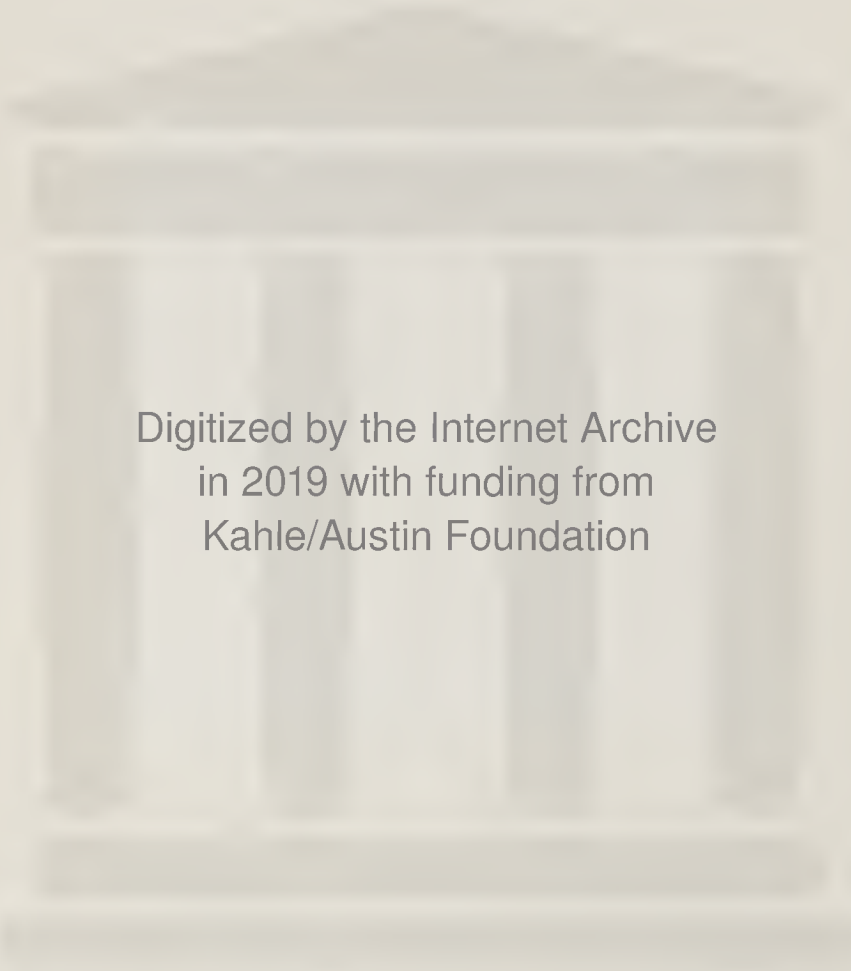
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SPENSER AND THE ENCHANTED GLASS

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SAID the Duchess: "I can't tell you just now what the moral of that is, but I shall remember it in a bit."

"Perhaps it hasn't one," Alice ventured to remark. "Tut, tut, child!" said the Duchess. "Everything's got a moral, if only you can find it. . . . O 'tis love, 'tis love, that makes the world go round!"

Thus lightly doth the satirist touch a modern fashion in criticism. For the disparagement of moral values in art and in literature has for a generation or two been the cant of critics. As moral values have sunk into such abatement and low price, so too have sunk such poetical stars of first magnitude as Milton and Pope and Spenser, and their diminished following have latterly fallen back from stout defence to feeble denial.

For example, a recent reviewer: "Much is sometimes made of Spenser's moral intention in composing the *Faerie Queene* and, indeed, Spenser rather paraded it himself. But in reality this moral intention amounts to little."

That notable Spenserian, Mr. Courthope, remarks "the absence of depth in Spenser's moral allegory," and another, both teacher and editor of Spenser, avers that "we should learn to dwell more upon the imaginative and picturesque qualities and less upon the purely ethical elements of the *Faery Queen* in order to prevent this poetic treasure from being consigned to oblivion."

Good Spenserians, I take it, will not worry about the oblivion of the poet. Moral or no moral, his great poem will take care of itself. And in passing, we may recall that over against the notion which I have cited are arrayed—emphat-

ically, sincerely, formidably—men no less than Raleigh, Milton, Pope, Gray, Wordsworth, Shelley, Tennyson—poets all—and poets, be it remembered, by their peculiar rights in Spenser, have the first and the last word.

Rather, next to the last. For the last and the first are properly those of Spenser himself, whose opinion is, after all, of greatest weight in this matter which concerns him most. It is easy but unfair and dangerous to assume, as writers do at times for their own ends, that even as great a man as Spenser did not know his own mind. If not he, how much less they? But what has Spenser to say?

Of the obvious and oft noted glories of his work Spenser seems to have been quite aware.

The waies, through which my weary steps I guyde,
In this delightfull land of Faery,
Are so exceeding spacious and wyde,
And sprinckled with such sweet variety,
Of all that pleasant is to eare or eye,
That I, nigh ravisht with rare thoughts delight,
My tedious travell doe forget thereby.

Here he notes in effect the splendors of pageantry, of spectacle and music, that delight all readers of the great poem, its scope and range, its variety, its wealth of antiquities, its other-world enchantment; he is aware, too, of the dazzling coruscation of grand ideas inwoven with the poem's fabric and subtly suggested throughout.

He would, then, approve our pleasure in the poem's pageantry, the fair processions of men old and young, of frolicking children and of dancing maidens and graces

with girlands dight,
As fresh as flowres in meadow greene doe grow,
When morning deaw upon their leaves doth light:
And in their handes sweet timbrels all upheld on hight.

Grotesque ballets, of satyrs and Sins and sea-monsters; strange mysterious rites; sun-flooded gardens; dark and deep reaches of forest-shade or sea depths, inland rivers, rich old

myth and symbolism, grim castles and gorgeous palaces—I cannot help wondering that some designer of murals for a great library has not discovered the infinite store of subject, all sketched and colored, in effect ready to his hand, in the vast spaces of the *Faery Queen*.

Spenser surely approves our pleasure in all this; but it is not his whole, nor even his chief concern. He abridges the pageantry of Marinell's wedding because

The pride of ladies, and the worth of knights,
The royall banquets, and the rare delights
Were worke fit for an herauld, not for me:
But for so much as to my lot here lights,
That with this present treatise doth agree,
True vertue to advance, shall here recounted bee.

But, one may ask, was Spenser's declared and avowed purpose his real one? When, at the outset, he announced,

Fierce warres and faithfull loves shall moralize my song,

did he mean it? When he wrote to Sir Walter Raleigh that "the generall end therefore of all the booke is to fashion a gentleman or noble person in vertuous and gentle discipline," was he sincere? When he cites the great heroic poets as his precedents for moral intention, is he honest? When he claims the authority of Aristotle for his ethical doctrine, is he only making a fashionable humanistic gesture? In his October eclogue of the *Shepherd's Calendar* wherein Piers and Cuddie debate whether poetry really pays, Piers, who speaks for Spenser, exclaims:

Cuddie, the prayse is better then the price,
The glory eke much greater then the gayne:
O what an honor is it, to restraine
The lust of lawlesse youth with good advice,
Or pricke them forth with pleasaunce of thy vaine,
Whereto thou list their trayned willes entice!

Do these numbers ring hollow? At any rate, they wcke an echo in a corner of the realms of gold as far and high as Milton's *Lycidas*.

Thus Spenser again and again both declares and implies that his moral purpose as an artist transcends and draws up into itself all other purposes of the poem.

We can, I think, on sober reflection, conclude only that the poet meant what he said, and that he would have regarded as partial, and in so far fallacious, all criticism and scholarship concerned which not only failed to take into account his moral intention, but failed to see it as the very soul and informing agent of his achievement.

But, apart from fashions in criticism and scholarship—for even the Learned Ladies have a weakness for styles—one very good reason offers itself for the neglect of Spenser's moral teaching. On closer consideration it proves not vague, but somehow inarticulate, unmeasurable. Ruskin talks of Spenser's moral system. But I fear it is Ruskin's system, not Spenser's which he unfolds. The veil of Spenser's allegory clothes no moral system, as Dante's allegory clothes a system. Dante inherited a definite frame and coherent structure of doctrine and symbols necessary to purposes of sustained allegory, and favorable, therefore, to the concrete, detached, scientific modes of modern scholarship. But Spenser lived in an age too late. For him and his world, the old system has passed, and he finds himself clinging only to its glittering fragments.

To be sure, there was Calvinism, systematic enough, but Calvinism was new. And for the uses of great poetic allegory more than consistency is necessary. Centuries of thought, and use, and symbol must accumulate. Hence the efforts of certain excellent scholars to trace the system of Calvin beneath the veil of the *Faery Queen* tend to reveal in effect only a misfit.

It was inevitable, therefore, that an allegory on so grand a scale as the *Faery Queen*, erected in a time so confused and paradoxical, must prove in the execution fortuitous, casual, in a sense fragmentary, for lack of a system.

"Oh but," some will say, "has he not claimed for himself the system of Aristotle as laid down in the *Nicomachean*

Ethics?" And they cite the familiar words in Spenser's letter to Raleigh: "I labour to pourtraict in Arthure, before he was King, the image of a brave knight, perfected in the twelve private morall vertues, as Aristotle hath devised, the which is the purpose of these first twelve books: which if I finde to be well accepted, I may be perhaps encoraged to frame the other part of poiliticke vertues in his person, after that he came to be king." Arthur then is to represent Magnanimity or Highmindedness, the epitome of all the virtues. Spenser continues: "But of the xii. other vertues I make xii. other knights the patrones. . . . of which these [the first] three bookes contayn three. The first of the Knight of the Redcrosse, in whome I expresse holynes" etc. Here at all events seems to be system enough—indeed the very scheme for an epic—a complete duodecimal framework—on which six, twelve, or twenty-four books may be set up according to the time-honored epic example.

But difficulties are in the way. Not to mention others, Aristotle himself disclaims any intention of rearing a system of virtues. He nowhere makes a sharp distinction such as Spenser implies between private and public virtues. To Aristotle they are all essentially public. Furthermore Spenser's list doesn't correspond with Aristotle's. For his First Book wears the label Holiness; the Second, Temperance; the Third, Chastity; the Fourth, Friendship; the Fifth, Justice; the Sixth, Courtesy; and a fragment of another, Constancy. Now scholars are put to it in this matter—some, indeed, beyond the point of dispassionate observation. At one extreme M. Jusserand finds the discrepancy between Spenser and Aristotle so wide as to suggest that Spenser never read the *Ethics* at all. But there comes another who is at great pains to prove—by brute force if necessary—that Spenser's scheme is just what he promised, Aristotle's and *only* Aristotle's, and as Dr. Johnson would say, "there's an end on't." Alas, this is not the end on't.

For illustration, let us consider Spenser's Second Book, the Book which tells the story of Sir Guyon, the Knight of

Temperance. Now Mr. Padelford has had no trouble in showing that, for all his label, "Temperance," Spenser exhibits in Sir Guyon not Temperance, but Continence, which is indeed quite a different matter. It is a distinction the artistic possibilities of which may have been suggested to Spenser by Castiglione in the Fourth Book of his *Book of the Courtier*, and which, for Spenser's moral purpose, is highly important.

Virtue, in Aristotle's famous definition, is a "state of deliberate moral purpose consisting in a mean. . . determined by reason." And as Temperance is a virtue, it is a state of character. Furthermore, Aristotle implies that Temperance, like any other moral state or virtue, is a result and an achievement of moral discipline under the dictates of reason, and that a man is not temperate until by practice and discipline he has at last achieved the state of temperate habit, both in action and in the desire that prompts to action. In short he has struggled up the steep, and now travels the exalted, though unvaried and less interesting, plateau of Temperance. Henceforth his reasonable moderation in both pleasures and desires is assured. And of course we are glad of his final success and wish him well. But the thing in which we are interested is not this state of virtue, but his struggle to attain to it. Witness Bunyan, Dante, Everyman, and the thousand and one other versions of the *Psychomachia* in all times. Witness also Spenser's free use of Aristotle. Now Aristotle's *ἑγκράτεια*, Continence, or Self-Control, for which Spenser exchanges Temperance, if it is ever a state of virtue at all, is at any rate more nearly a state of unstable equilibrium. Continence implies that in the struggle between right and wrong, the natural desires, as allies of wrong, are more evenly matched against reason and intelligence, the allies of right, than in the case of Temperance; that a man is continent so long as reason wins, but incontinent when the natural desires get the best of it. The struggle is always recurring. Of course reason may win every time. Or it may lose every time.

And where the struggle is less apparent, and the hero is more securely virtuous, Spenser provides an external struggle between the perfected virtue of the hero and conditions of the world about him with which the virtuous knight-errant or reformer finds himself at variance. Was this not after all very much the situation of Spenser himself—as of one who experienced the inner moral struggle, while he contended with the conditions of his own time?

But another, among the great ancients, was closer to Spenser than was Aristotle. The poet—idealist that he was—had a natural instinct and affinity for Platonic and neo-Platonic ways of thinking or intuitions. You remember Plato's figure of the loved one as a glass in which the lover really beholds himself, though he knows it not. Spenser seems to have recognized himself in Plato—not in the whole of Plato—but at least in Plato's idealism, especially his idealization of the romantic passion. Spenser's cast of mind is in great measure Platonic, and whatever he derives from Aristotle is ancillary and subject to his prevailing Platonic enthusiasm. From the *Shepherd's Calendar* to the *Prothalamion* this quality of the poet's mind reveals itself again and again. Furthermore when the Platonic phrase or thought is not in evidence, a deep Platonic undertone is easily distinguishable, that mingles with the whole, fills it with import, and renders both music and meaning of the poem more rich and strange. Thus it is not a system of thought which Spenser derives from Plato, any more than from Aristotle, or the Middle Ages, or Calvin, but rather certain congenial ideas, and a pervading quality.

Somewhat wilfully and arbitrarily he ranges among the thoughts of others, particularly Aristotle and Plato. He is "ravisht with rare thoughts delight." Like Milton he feeds

on thoughts that voluntary move

Harmonious numbers.

He appropriates here and there such conceptions and ideas as fit exactly his own intense experience and aspirations.

These great fragments, newly vitalized with the energy of his own spiritual life, and projected in concrete form, constitute his poetry.

But what, one may ask, was there about Spenser to generate the energy and heat of his moral convictions? What indeed, but the conflict that awaits every idealist born into the world? No idealist was ever more keenly aware than Spenser of the sharp clash between the ideal world as he conceived it, and all that is finite, mundane, actual. As early as the *Shepherd's Calendar* he sets a worthless clergy over against an ideal cure of souls, a worldly, faint-hearted poet over against one of pure devotion to his art, and puts the question, "the price or the praise?" In *Mother Hubbard's Tale* and in *Colin Clout's Come Home Again* he contrasts a corrupt and immoral court of the Renaissance with ideal service to Prince and Commonwealth. This contrast extends by implication throughout the *Faery Queen*. Such the antinomy between actual and ideal which ranges through all his varied transcriptions of life even to his last poem. But in the *Faery Queen* the warfare is most fierce and acute. The struggle between false and true is ever renewed, never finally settled. I find no compromise, no truce between these extremes. And this struggle but bodies forth the war in the poet's soul, and the clash between his vision of an ideal world and the moral flaws of the world into which he was born. Fierce wars and faithful loves do indeed moralize his song—the wars and loves, the struggles and adorations of the man himself. Subtle gradations and fine shadings of mingled good and evil abound, to be sure, especially in the later Books. The Fourth, for example, is a symphonic treatment of many widely varied themes of amatory love in relation to friendship. But the main issue everywhere none the less prevails—the issue between good and evil, between right and wrong, between life as it is and life as it ought to be.

The *Faery Queen* as Spenser left it consists of six Books. What so natural as to regard the six Books, one virtue to a Book, as six separate and systematic poetical essays on six

several virtues—Holiness, Temperance, Chastity, and such? It is easy to imagine each of these Books as a compartment of esoteric, abstract truth, first accessible only to him who can discover the right manipulation of wards, tumblers, and combinations. At any rate some Spenserian scholars have exhibited feats of highly elaborate and subtle lock-picking. Now I cannot but suspect that there is no need of such subtlety; that the doors are unfastened, nay, ajar; that, once inside, nothing especially strange, or subtle, or esoteric will be found, unless it be some fanciful and ingenious construction which the student himself, in his zeal, has unwittingly "planted" there. In short, the secret of the moral allegory, if secret there be, is but the character and quality of Spenser himself, the wars and the loves and aspirations of his own spiritual problem, and of the world in which he moved.

Thus the structural cleavage or division of the *Faery Queen* is not up and down, between Book and Book, virtue and virtue; but latitudinal, between these personal moral issues of the poet, which horizontally traverse and pervade the entire work.

First and most prevalent is the moral issue between carnal lust and pure affection or chastity. It is not the issue of the Third Book especially, but is ubiquitous, because Spenser was more interested in the experience and spiritual potentialities of romantic love than in anything else.

No one can read Spenser's poetry without seeing that he was peculiarly susceptible to the charms of women. The trait is almost as conspicuous in him as in Byron and Burns. He did not marry till he was forty-two, and it is probable, nay certain, both from his verse, and the nature of the man, that he had experienced at least one unhappy love affair, to the memories of which he clung with strange fondness. Whether the lady was Rosalind or who else matters little. Such experience, not to mention the erotic fashions in high life of the time described in *Colin Clout's Come Home* and familiar to every reader, precipitated and prolonged the conflict in his own nature between sensuality and an idealistic

or Platonic influence of the grand passion upon his own spiritual life. Had he married early the two elements might early have become reconciled. And indeed in what may be his post-marital poetry the issue seems to grow less acute. Spenser, like most men, had not attained to the stable equilibrium of Aristotle's virtuous man. As in most men inclined to behave themselves, the struggle between continence and incontinence was in him continuous or recurrent. In so highly sensitive and idealistic a man it must have been singularly acute, but with a difference. As a substitute for Aristotle's "reason," his chief reinforcement to continence is an idealism partly Platonic, partly Christian, "another law, warring against the law of his mind." Such seems to me the first moral issue in Spenser's poetry.

Aristotle says that continence pertains not to carnal desires alone, but also to the passion of anger, love of honor, and the love of gain. Whether Spenser had a troublesome temper, I cannot say. Angry violence was surely a besetting sin of his times. But his desire for honor and gain, for prominent position and wealth, admits no denial. Ashamed as he was of it, he could never rise wholly superior to his ambition in politics and at court. With Spenser the infirmity was chronic and incurable. In even his latest lines it mingles with more tranquil notes to effect some of his sweetest and most moving melody.

Calme was the day, and through the trembling ayre
 Sweete breathing Zephyrus did softly play,
 A gentle spirit, that lightly did delay
 Hot Titans beames, which then did glyster fayre:
 When I, whom sullein care,
 Through discontent of my long fruitlesse stay
 In princes court, and expectation vayne
 Of idle hopes, which still doe fly away,
 Like empty shaddowes, did afflict my brayne,
 Walkt forth to ease my payne
 Along the shoare of silver streaming Themmes;
 Whose ruddy bancke, the which his river hemmes,
 Was paynted all with variable flowers,

And all the meades adornd with daintie gemmes,
 Fit to decke maydens bowres,
 And crowne their paramours,
 Against the brydale day, which is not long:
 Sweete Themmes, runne softly, till I end my song.

Nor did he ever recover from the humiliation of his early failure in public life—a failure which seems to have been predetermined in his youth by imprudent public utterance at the time when his hopes were highest. The very imprudence of *Mother Hubbard's Tale* has something characteristic of the idealist in it, such an idealist as has often been the helpless fool of mean and selfish politicians. Later attempts to redeem his failure with the help of his incomparable performances in literature came to naught; and I see in him a man whose worldly ambitions were continually at war with his sense of their unworthiness and his appreciation of higher values. He longed for conspicuous position, while he knew its real worth in spiritual terms. This, I believe, is the second of the moral issues that dominate the *Faery Queen*.

This issue is interwoven with the whole fabric, appearing and reappearing in such places as the Palace of Lucifera, in the ghastly laystall of the world's greatest at the posterngate in the Cave of Mammon, and the golden chain of Philotime (a temptation, be it noted, that prostrated the good Sir Guyon as did no other), in the episode of Pollente and Munera, of Philterra and Amidas, of old Malbecco.

I read it also in the suggestions of true and solid fame—more with Spenser than a Renaissance convention—in his Gloriana, his Cleopolis, his choice of Clio as his Muse instead of Calliope, the legitimate mother of epic; for had he not read that Clio is the Muse named for κλέος, i.e., fame? Spenser never could resist an etymology. But in this instance more is involved—his ambitions, worthy and unworthy, ever at war.

A greater artistic effect, however, seems to have sprung from this issue. It appears, as I see it, in the detachment—

sometimes pathetic, sometimes wistful, sometimes grim—of his great heroes. They are singularly alone, unassociated, unacclaimed, toiling along the unfrequented road to Cleopolis. Had Milton, I wonder, caught a poetic impulse from this moral value in his sage and serious Spenser, which drew forth his cadences on “the last infirmity of noble minds?”

As Spenser saw other men easily gaining the prizes that in the worldly part of himself he so passionately desired, and saw them to that end closely involved in intrigue, duplicity, and false dealing, these methods must, to one of Spenser’s moral sort, have been either a matter of daily temptation, or of intense hatred. On every hand at Court and in Ireland he encountered them, and honest and confiding as he was, he suffered disillusionment after disillusionment until he distrusted all appearance. Hence everywhere in the Faery world he asserts and reasserts the moral issue between false and true. The bluff of the monsters Error and Orgoglio, of Braggadocchio, the shifting and baffling disguises of Archimago and Duessa, the undoing speciousness of Lucifera, and Phaedria, and Acrasia, and Despair, the host of “such malengine and fine forgerie” as Dolon, and Guizor, and Guile, Malice, and Despite, the archenemies of Mercilla—and many more. Everywhere this motive runs, but is most sustained in the story and counter-story of the true and the false Florimel—false Florimel who proved everyone a victim to mere appearances but the great Britomart.

No wonder Spenser exclaims:

What man so wise, what earthly witt so ware
As to disery the crafty cunning traine,
By which Deceipt doth maske in visour faire,
And cast her coulours, died deepe in graine,
To seeme like Truth, whose shape she well can faine,
And fitting gestures to her purpose frame,
The guiltlesse man with guile to entertaine?

Then as the years dragged on, soul-weary with disappointment, with disillusionment, with the heart-sickening situation in Ireland, Spenser comes to grips with the depression that weighs down his soul; and as the brave pageant moves by, one catches the recurring undersong of despondency:

Blisse may not abide in state of mortall men.

Nothing is sure that growes on earthly grownd.

So feeble is mans state, and life unsound.

Nothing on earth mote alwaies happy beene.

For who will bide the burden of distresse
Must not here thinke to live: for life is wretchednesse.

Here on earth is no sure happinesse.

Litle sweet
Oft tempred is . . . with muchell smart.

What on earth can alwayes happie stand?
The greater prowesse greater perils find.

O why doe wretched men so much desire
To draw their dayes unto the utmost date,
And doe not rather wish them soone expire,
Knowing the miserie of their estate,
And thousand perills which them still awate,
Tossing them like a boate amid the mayne,
That every houre they knocke at Deathes gate?

Pageant after pageant is disrupted by brute force, or fate, and dissolves into naught, like the exquisite idylls in the Sixth Book. One embodiment of depression succeeds another like Despair, Amavia, the weeping nymph, the Garden of Proserpina; and the malady invades even the exalted souls of Britomart and Arthur.

The reason why the Seven Deadly Sins are no more than seven is doubtless a pretty reason. Yet, like the seven stars, they once were eight, and the missing sin, Tristitia, chronic despondency, points another of the moral issues in the poet's soul and in his poem.

Small wonder if such a man should lean more and more to Heraclitus, should see about him a mutable and unstable world, wherein all is in flux, and naught shall abide; that he should, in his spiritual warfare, join this issue repeatedly throughout his poem and eventually design a whole Book on the theme.

It was and had been a common theme of mediaeval and Renaissance art, but Spenser resumes it with a frequency, especially towards the end, that implies deep and warm conviction. It reaches its culmination in the superb fragment of Mutability, who in all earthly things

Beares the greatest sway:

Which makes me loath this state of life so tickle,
And love of things so vaine to cast away;
Whose flowring pride, so fading and so fickle,
Short Time shall soon cut down with his consuming sickle.

Not only his shattered ambitions but his long years amid the insecure conditions of a half-civilized frontier, and his foreboding of the terrible storm of rebellion that eventually swept him away to poverty and death, bore in upon him the conviction that all earthly things are fleeting.

These, then, would appear to be the moral issues within the soul of the idealist Spenser—sensuality over against idealized love or Chastity; worldly ambition over against high, honorable, and chivalrous dealing; despondency and despair in a fluctuating world over against cheerful security in a sense of Absolute Goodness and Beauty.

In two explicit arraignments of public life in his time Spenser indicts the age and the Court for lust, greed, ambition, envy and malice, violent and sudden anger, and specious pretence. Of certain of these we have already observed the counterpart in his own moral problem. Two others of them at least preoccupied him as vices of his time—Violence and Slander.

This habit of sudden, violent, disruptive temper which he saw on every side of him—in the daily quarrels of such men as Essex, and Oxford, and even his own friend Raleigh, in the

bloodstained violence of Shan Oneall and his kind, he must have viewed as a barbaric obstacle to civility and the realization of a great imperial England.

Firebrand of hell, first tynd in Phlegeton
By thousand furies, and from thence out throwen
Into this world, to worke confusion
And set it all on fire by force unknowen.

The motive is ubiquitous in the *Faery Queen* from the first sudden, dangerous indignations of the Red Cross Knight to the rage of the Blatant Beast at the close.

Envy, too, and Slander he clearly suffered both on his own behalf and on behalf of his friends, since these were inescapable in political life then—if one may say that they have ceased to be since. That he hated them with a white-hot hatred none can doubt. You will recall that the arch-enemy of Calidore, the Knight of Courtesy, is not an obvious opponent—Boorishness, or Violence, or Savagery—but the Blatant Beast, which imports envious Slander, who after Calidore had subdued and bound him, broke his bonds, and escaped.

So now he raungeth through the world againe.

Invidious Slander is also the last foe of Justice. In the moment of his supreme triumph Artegall is beleaguered by two Irish hags, Envy and Detraction, and the Blatant Beast. And his death is foretold “by practise criminal of secret foes.”

The poet's hatred of this monster never sleeps. Consider the terrible sonnet against one who had slandered him to his lady-love:

Venemous tounge, tipt with vile adders sting,
Of that selfe kynd with which the Furies fell
Theyr snaky heads doe combe, from which a spring
Of poysoned words and spitefull speeches well,
Let all the plagues and horrid paines of hell
Upon thee fall for thine accursed hyre,
That with false forged lyes, which thou didst tel,
In my true love did stirre up coles of yre.

These simple, and perhaps obvious, antinomies—critical and dangerous in the poet's spiritual life, and, as he thought, in England, mingle with the whole fabric of the *Faery Queen*.

The First Book is a fair illustration. No theoretical or abstract Aristotelian virtue is the Red Cross Knight. He is almost autobiographical. His whole story is the story of a struggle towards virtue very much like that of Spenser himself.

Spenser was already engaged on his First Book during his twenties, in the heyday of his youthful hopes, and doubtless finished it while still a young man. Meanwhile he learned about women from Rosalind, or whomever; his aspirations as a man of the world burgeoned, broke into luxuriant bloom, under the favor of Sidney, Leicester, and the Queen, and then suddenly faded and fell. He found himself in Ireland—as it were, in the Philippines, Balkans, Anatolia—for an indefinite stay, and with leisure to make what moral character and poetry he could out of his disillusionments.

The gentle knight who comes pricking o'er the plain into the first stanza of the First Book is a wholly inexperienced young man. He is an Englishman, with the blood of Saxon kings in his breeding, but wholesomely combined with a boyhood and youth spent close to the soil in a farmer's household. Spenser, in so presenting him, could hardly, I suppose, have been thinking of his own aristocratic origin and bourgeois youth. The hero of the story, with all the winsome enthusiasm of a high-spirited and well-bred lad, throws himself into his career. There is a girl—a lovely creature, one among all women for her purity and sweetness and fidelity, but not of the sort that makes a furore among men. The young man does not at once fall deeply in love with her, and indeed takes her almost casually, though her partly maternal, partly romantic interest in him no one but the lad himself can fail to see.

His first adventure is a fight with the monster Error, a gruesome and filthy she-dragon in the direct literary line that stretches from Grendel's dam to the Jabberwock. But what

kind of Error is this? For all the commentators say, it might be just plain Error in general, if such there be. But how, one might ask, if the Red Cross Knight first overcomes Error in general, does he fall into so much error later on? Ruskin seems to be right, however, when he finds a clue in the not very tidy line, "Her vomit full of bookes and papers was." Clearly this is Error of doctrine, of books, multiclamorous cant, and evil counsel, which din in the ears of every young person during the period of his education. The fight is vigorous, but not doubtful. The young man is proof by very breeding against silly and specious ideas from whatever authority. He refutes them by a sort of habit and instinct. They fall naturally from his mind. Such Error is easily vanquished. But the harder task remains to validate and prove the truth of his experience.

And he has not long to wait, for here comes a gentle inoffensive old man, whom the Red Cross Knight addresses with just a trace of assurance caught partly from his first easy triumph and partly from the girl's admiring congratulation on his success. But the old man is a Deceiver, to wit the notorious Archimage, and he imposes upon the ingenuous but self-assured young person with pathetic ease. A series of cleverly managed misrepresentations deceive the young man, and he falls out with the woman who is the mainstay of his life, yet whom he does not really know. He then picks up with a more intriguing female—to all appearances more desirable, as the world desires. What is more, he wins her by his personal prowess from another man.

I notice two very natural touches in Spenser's narrative at this point. First, in a fit of righteous indignation, and with something of the absolute downrightness of youth,

His eie of reason was with rage yblent.

Then he deserts Una without any attempt to explore the matter. Thus he wanders aimlessly far away.

Still flying from his thoughts and gealous feare:
Will was his guide, and grieve led him astray.

Clearly he misses not Una so much as he resents—with a touch of youthful selfishness perhaps—the reflection which her apparent infidelity casts upon his dignity.

Such grief is easily dispelled the moment a popular woman shows interest in him, especially if, as in this case, she drops another man to take him up. She is too artful to try to capture him with gaiety. She appeals to his warm but unseasoned heart as one in sad plight, “friendlesse, unfortunate.”

Soon they are engrossed in a flirtation, which for him is innocent and most consoling. Forgotten are his troubles, forgotten is Una, forgotten his career, forgotten all but the present delicious moment, when they are interrupted by a fantastic episode that would have put him on his guard against this dangerous but delightful girl, had she not quickly played her highest trump-card and fainted in his arms.

Clearly, she sees, he needs something to take his attention—something engrossing. She introduces him into Society, that is, to the Palace of Pride, a Renaissance Court, the beau-monde—by whatever name it is the same perennial thing, gorgeous, ostentatious, unsubstantial, thronged, fickle, yet fascinating. Everybody is there—at least everybody that counts—all agog for the favor of her who is arbitress of their social success. Of course there is a deal of iniquity beneath this gorgeous spectacle, but the callow young knight cannot yet discern it. He finds himself at once a social favorite. Why not? He is young, able, handsome, has already scored at least two conspicuous successes, and his natural charm suffers nothing by a certain ingenuousness, the basic ingredient in many a social triumph. All this is pleasant enough for a time. At length he happens to fall foul of a quarrelsome gentleman named Sans Joy, who will take it out of him, willy nilly. But the Lady Lucifera, the social leader, with an eye single to successful social events, stops the impromptu fight, and turns it into a society affair. She stages a magnificent duel for her guests. Though his opponent escapes defeat by a trick, the Red Cross Knight gains the credit of a victory, and enormous vogue for the moment.

But something is queer about this place. Even he sees that, though he is not discerning enough to explain the rather inscrutable behavior of his lady Duessa, who is really playing a double game. Meanwhile with a lurking instinct quite natural in a well-bred youth, that this is no place or company for him, he stumbles upon the reverse view of the whole situation—the broken hearts and bitter thrall that have overtaken all who devoted themselves to this kind of success. Such are Croesus, Nimrod, Sulla, Tarquin, Cleopatra, nay heroes like Alexander, Scipio, Hannibal, and the great Julius himself.

I confess I can never read these passages without reflections upon Spenser's own ever-recurring illusion and disillusion of like kind. But after his quiet escape what? Nothing. He has no aim apparently beyond sitting in a pleasant spot luxuriating in the loveliness about him. The lady, whom he has deserted in somewhat the same inconsiderate fashion of his parting from Una, will not let him off so easily. She overtakes him, and with pretty reproaches reduces him again to helpless subjection. Idly he stoops to refresh himself with a draft from a shady spring.

Eftsoones his manly forces gan to fayle,
And mightie strong was turnd to feeble frayle
His chaunged powres at first them selves not felt,
Till crudled cold his corage gan assayle,
And chearefull blood in fayntnes chill did melt,
Which, like a fever fit, through all his body swelt.

Yet goodly court he made still to his dame,
Pourd out in loosnesse on the grassy grownd,
Both carelesse of his health, and of his fame.

The situation is clear. He has had nothing thus far but success and popularity and attention. True he lost his first lady Una, but that was her fault, he thought, and he has suffered little wrong but injured pride. Now he is without a purpose, without vision or inspiration. He is unaware of what he has lost in Una, grows self-gratulatory and impotent, and easily falls prey to the least formidable of his adversaries

the braggart Orgoglio. Captive in the dungeon of this giant he has leisure to review his course and realize his plight. But if he has to all appearances failed by trusting too much his own powers, ever vigilant and devoted Una has not relaxed her efforts to save him. Arthur comes to her aid, overcomes Orgoglio, forces the dungeon, and she rescues the hero in the last stages of depression over his failure.

Now he sees the real devotion of Una and beholds, stripped of all her blandishments, Duessa and all her kind. May I call attention here to a rather exquisite touch in Spenser's narrative? When Una, overjoyed, reclaims her hero, not a thought of blame enters her mind. With almost maternal partiality she excuses all that has happened:

Ah, dearest lord! what evill starre
On you hath frownd, and pourd his influence bad,
That of your selfe ye thus berobbed arre,
And this misseeming hew your manly looks doth marre?

But welcome now, my lord, in wele or woe,
Whose presence I have lackt too long a day;
And fye on Fortune, mine avowed foe,
Whose wrathful wreakes them selves doe now alay,
And for these wronges shall treble penance pay
Of treble good: good growes of evils priefe.

The Red Cross Knight in shamed realization of her true worth has no word to utter. But his full sense of his own defection is yet to come. As it grows upon him, he is face to face with Despair. And though he enters upon this deepest and most subtle of his trials with a trace of his old swagger, he falls quickly by the specious reasoning of guilty depression into such deep and agonizing remorse that he madly rushes upon suicide. In the very act Una again saves him.

Out of his hand she snatcht the cursed knife,
And threw it to the ground, enraged rife,
And to him said: "Fie, fie, faint hearted knight!
What meanest thou by this reprochfull strife?
Is this the battaile, which thou vauntst to fight?"

With faultless sense of his predicament she forces him from contemplation of a miserable and hopeless past to consider the redeemable future in service to her. And he is saved for ever.

Rightly enough expositors have interpreted this episode and the whole Book as an illustration of Spenser's Platonic faith in the power of pure and noble love to redeem the soul of man. But to me it is something more than Platonic; it is Spenserian. Spenser has authenticated the exalted teaching of Diotima in the *Symposium*, nay of the Gospels themselves, through his own struggle in the clash of noble and ignoble in his own soul. The last cantos, especially the tenth and twelfth, ring with the sound conviction of one who knows these things because he has lived them.

Only one episode remains. Out of his recovery he rises with Una or superhuman Truth at his side to a vision of supreme values, to a point whence he beholds all things human in their true light and relationship. Henceforth he is established, mature, reliable, and betrothed for ever to her who is above all lovely, faithful, and good. In her service his real career begins just as the Book closes.

The Age of Elizabeth presents certain strong analogies with our own time and land. Like ours it was parvenu.

Within a century England had become a new country—as new as ours. The old order had perished in complete revolution. Old feudal society had crumbled under the strong hand of the Tudors. The old faith had been superseded. The old monastic and ecclesiastical order had been abolished. Everyone in England was affected, profoundly affected, by the change. A parvenu family was on the throne, and a new theory of absolutism prevailed. Even the aristocracy was new, and with the strong reassertion of individualism careers were open to all talents that could command them. But as in Italy, so in Tudor England such careers lay open primarily through the Court and the Prince's favor. Plungers and adventurers abounded. The game, with sudden and incredible wealth or power as its prize, flattered men into

venturing all. The world flocked to London. The sensational or brilliant rise and fall at Court was an almost everyday occurrence. All things were possible. Our young men seek success in the west or south; the young Elizabethan dreamed of it at all four receding points of the compass. Luxury and dissipation increased with wealth. So did ostentation. So did extravagance. The reins fell slack upon the mad passions of men. High as Elizabethan achievement often rose, yet with it went intrigue, trickery, scandal, envy, and all questionable practice. Graft was almost universal, and easily condoned. Men boasted, quarrelled, and broke into lawless violence. Of such times the *Faery Queen* is the faithful mirror.

Elizabethan England was not only parvenu, but it was conscious through increasing intercourse with Italy and the rest of the world of its provincialism. Hence perhaps the lively discussion of theories of education and manners during the century, and the number of works bearing thereupon of which Elyot's, Lyly's, Ascham's, Hoby's, and Mulcaster's are most conspicuous. The *Faery Queen* too was clearly regarded by Spenser as such a work—a work to help civilize Englishmen, to make of the imperfect England about him the great imperial England which he and his associates envisioned. Such transformation must be moral. It must work with the individual. Of this he was sure. Sir Philip Sidney in his *Defence* so maintains, and so doubtless did Spenser in his lost treatise on poetry. So he clearly states in his *View of the Present State of Ireland*, where the talk falls upon the Irish Bards:

I have reade that in all ages Poets have beene had in speciall reputation, and that (me thinkes) not without great cause; for besides their sweete inventions, and most wittie layes, they have alwayes used to set foorth the praises of the good and vertuous, and to beate downe and disgrace the bad and vitious. So that many brave yong mindes, have oftentimes thorough hearing the praises and famous eulogies of worthie men sung and reported unto them, beene stirred up to affect the like commendations, and so to strive to

the like deserts. [And Irenaeus (Spenser) rejoins] It is most true, that such Poets as in their writings doe labour to better the manners of men, and thorough the sweete baite of their numbers, to steale into the young spirits a desire of honour and vertue, are worthy to bee had in great respect.

“To steale into the young spirits a desire of honour and vertue.” “To entice,” as he said years before—“To entice with pleasance of his vein.” Not by bald precept nor by neat admonition, but by enchantment through ear, eye, fancy, mind, to capture the imaginations of men, and release in their souls, thus made susceptible, moral forces effectual for their regeneration, and for the regeneration through them of their times.

The young Britomart, destined to mother great England, began her high career “by a vision.” As she gazed into the enchanted glass of Merlin, she beheld, as she supposed, the image of her lover-to-be, the heroic knight of Justice, Artegall. In reality she beheld herself, for this enchanted glass is but the Platonic mirror of the *Phaedrus*, in which the lover “beholds himself, but he is not aware of this.” Nay it hath power

to shew in perfect sight
What ever thing was in the world contaynd
Betwixt the lowest earth and hevens hight
Forthy it round and hollow shaped was,
Like to the world it selfe, and seemed a world of glas.

Such is the enchanted glass of the *Faery Queen*. As we gaze and meditate upon its shifting pageant, its lights and shadows, its images of passion and heroic magnitude of mind, we gain truer intimations of moral values than we can seize groping amid the noise, dust, and confusion of the actual world. In this enchanted glass of the poet we discern the image of Spenser himself, of his world, of *the* world, nay, of ourselves, of much perhaps that he did not there see himself. He would have been the first to approve. For such heightened and corrected vision—heightened and corrected

by long contemplation—is one of this poet's peculiar gifts, and one which has made him a begetter of poets.

Unsubstantial and ineffectual all this pageant, were it not informed with the moral energies generated in the poet's warfare with evil in himself and his time.

As subtle, as powerful, as pervasive as this, seems to me the moral element in the *Faery Queen*. And who—critic or scholar—can ever measure its fulfilment of the poet's intention during these last three centuries and more, or for all time to come?

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